



TEXT CAMPBELL MATTINSON

# Red Ahead

Decanters at the ready for the latest single-site releases from Yalumba, Penfold's fresh take on an old favourite and an exciting shiraz from a brand new Barossa outfit.

## YALUMBA SINGLE SITE

A wine's price doesn't tell you how expensive it is. It depends on the quality, prestige, rarity and all manner of factors. The Yalumba wine company – a leader at everything from cask wine to exclusive wine – has just released a new range of single-site reds at \$80 per bottle. My heart sank when I saw the price (not another bloody expensive range!) but after a few sips I changed my tune. This is a fabulous set of reds and given that other such deluxe beauties can sell for north of \$200 per bottle, the price of the new Yalumba range is not excessive at all.

There are five reds in the inaugural release, all of them substantially flavoured, stylish

and built for the long cellaring haul. The 2005 vintage includes shiraz from the 90-year-old Swingbridge vineyard in the Eden Valley; grenache from the 40-year-old Habermann vineyard in the Bethany sub-region of the Barossa Valley; shiraz from the 40-year-old Hahn Farm vineyard in the Light Pass sub-region of the Barossa Valley; and a shiraz from the 74-odd-year-old Fromm vineyard in the Lyndoch sub-region at the southern end of the Barossa.

They're all stunning statements of their region, variety and site, and exactly the kind of wine that Australia needs to think about, produce and promote. I have no hesitation in recommending them all, in particular the

shiraz wines. And of those there is one that really gets my heart racing – the **2005 Yalumba Fromm Vineyard Shiraz** (\$80). It's the kind of wine that surprises you with its power. It's not the darkest wine on the planet, nor the most concentrated. And yet it powers through your mouth with bursts of boysenberries and coffee and reaches long, juicy and tannic through the finish. It's quite spectacular – and will be even better when it's mature, from about six year's time onwards. A wine of this calibre never comes cheap, because such wines are rare.

## HARCOURT VALLEY VINEYARD SIGHTINGS SHIRAZ AND CAB SAV

The story of a vineyard is always one of ebb and flow. Quality, commitment, rain, drought, good years and bad – the wines it eventually produces will always vary, across both eras and seasons. Part of this ebb and flow is of course due to the weather, but a significant factor is the amount of energy and time those tending the vines have. Tasting the more recent red wine releases from the Harcourt Valley Vineyard in central Victoria, I had a feeling that the energy levels are high at the moment – because the wines have taken a leap in quality. Turns out, I was right (there's a first time for everything).

The vineyard was planted in 1976 by Ray and Barbara Broughton, which makes it something of a pioneer in the modern history of Victorian wine. In 1989 it was bought by John and Barbara Livingstone, though in the past couple of years their sons Kye and Quinn Livingstone have poured a whole lot of energy into the way the vineyard and winery are run. I've tasted a range of cabernet, shiraz and malbec wines from the vineyard in recent times but the two stand-out wines have been the **2006 Harcourt Valley Vineyards**

**Sightings Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$20) and the **2007 Harcourt Valley Vineyards Sightings Shiraz** (\$20). If you see any of the cabernet sauvignon, grab it immediately – it's a beautifully structured, evenly weighted wine of impact and length. It's immensely good value and there's the rub – there's not much of it about and those who taste it tend to dive back in for more.

The 2007 Harcourt Valley Vineyard Sightings Shiraz is in limited supply too, but it's only just been released, so with a bit of hunting around you should be able to locate it. It's worth the effort. It is the perfect \$20 red. It has oodles of supple, plummy, juicy fruit flavour. It has a light coating of toasty, spicy, cedary oak. And it finishes with enough tannins to chew on, without it ever really getting in the way. For casual red drinkers or enthusiasts, this wine is a winner.

## PENFOLDS KOONUNGA HILL SHIRAZ CABERNET

Will Penfolds ever release another Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet in the same class as the 1998 or 1990 or 1986 releases? It's a question that I get asked a lot by people who loved those wines for their exceptional quality and price, but also for their ability to mature well in the cellar.

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The easy answer is that the Koonunga Hill range in general can still leave a bit to be desired, but that specifically the Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet continues to be a very good wine – certainly the 2005 and 2007 releases are – capable of cellaring well.

The more difficult, but much better, answer is the soon-to-be-released **2007 Penfolds Koonunga Hill Seventy Six Shiraz Cabernet** (\$19) that in quality terms is everything a Koonunga Hill red has ever been. This 2007 is balanced and pure, evenly structured and comes rippled with bright, ripe, berried flavour. It's in the same style as the general commercial release Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet – with a smidge more weight of flavour. This is definitely a wine to stick in your cellar for five or even 10 years.

That's the good news – the bad news is that the Seventy Six wine is predominantly available via restaurant wine lists, and duty-free stores. As intimated above though, you can also get this wine via Penfolds' Magill Estate cellar door in South Australia ... and that's where I'll be buying mine.

## ARETE SHIRAZ

Given the change in the financial climate over the past year or two there are a lot of wines that are now looking very expensive – a change of circumstance is like a change of light, the impression can suddenly alter. It's great then to see a Barossa red of integrity and class with a reasonable price-tag.

Indeed, it seems to be part of a trend: a few years ago it was a given that the largest wine companies would offer most of the best-value wines, but more recently the little guys are sticking their noses in front. Economies of scale might work against them but the ability to sell direct, and the flexibility to cut margins according to the demands of the market, is to their advantage – all, of course, a boon to wine buyers.

I'm talking here of a new outfit called Arete. It's based in the Barossa Valley with the wines made by Richard Bate, who has not only been an oak barrel salesman (François

Frères) but has also worked vintages at Saltram, Wolf Blass and Penfolds. He doesn't make big quantities of wine under his Arete label, but he does make them well.

The wine that has especially caught my eye is his **2008 Arete Shiraz** (\$20). It's grown on the Hill Block – a vineyard owned and run by the noted Kalleske family – in the Greenock sub-region of the Barossa Valley in iron-rich soils. It's a site that tends to ripen grapes slowly. The wine is 14.4 percent alcohol and in truth its flavours are ever-so-slightly jammy. Mostly though it's boysenberried and floral with a gentle sprinkle of spice. It's not excessively oaked – it sits in a ripe, fruity, solid groove, offering dark-fruit flavours of obvious deliciousness. The price is spot on, as is the wine.



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